

THE MIRACLE

Drawings by Willy Pogany

By MAUDE RADFORD WARREN



"Life was a glorious adventure!"

ROLIN was walking on the terrace of his country house with his daughter Adela. The place was superlative: no one else had so many acres, or such high ground, or so large a house, or such a magnificent stretch of the Hudson River to call his own. And that was because he was Rolin, whose ideal was said to be taking rather than giving. He paced beside Adela serenely, the sun striking across his masterful head and neat blond beard, in which not a touch of gray showed. He was a handsome man; but Adela was beautiful: in her, as in all he touched, his assets had been multiplied.

Adela admired her father, and had that fear of him which is the deference paid to what is powerful and also unknown. She did not feel in the least that she knew him. To her he typified most of all an unbreakable and unchangeable will, of which his splendid force was the symbol. He talked little, and was always guarded in what he said, even when he was alone with her; so that she felt she was better acquainted with some of her many friends than with him. But she did understand that next to his power he cared for and had a pride in her.

"Father," she said to him with an impulsiveness unusual in her, "do you know I wish we had a place somewhere that I didn't feel superior to?"

He waited attentively, as was his custom.

"I mean I think we ought to feel occasionally a flicker of humility in the face of Nature—and I never have. I can swim across the Hudson, I can climb these hills, I can walk over this sward—and so I despise them all."

Rolin smiled slightly. "There are places I could take you where the waves would dash you to pieces in five minutes, prairies where you could be lost and starve, stone walls of mountains that you could never climb. But I don't know that I want you destroyed just to teach you a respect for Nature."

His inscrutable face showed her none of the admiration he felt for her beauty. Adela was a creature all gold,—golden eyes, golden hair, and a golden-tinted complexion. Rolin thought that she walked like a Princess he used often to see when he was a lad in the streets of Brussels, standing with hat in hand to watch the great lady pass, little dreaming that the day would come when she would read of him as one of the richest men in the world. But Adela did not really walk like a Princess so much as like a dryad of the woods, or some other pagan creature, conscious of power, but not conscious of limitation.

"And yet," Rolin added in a meditative tone, "it's that very quality in me, a sense that there is no ideal bigger than my own ability to conquer, which has enabled me to do what I have, and will make you some day the richest woman in America. After your mother's death I remained in America just for this end."

HE had never spoken so frankly to her before. In her quick glance he saw her thought, and replied to it.

"I want to tell you what is in my mind this morning, Adela. I've been thinking of you the better part of the night. As you know, Hale and I spent the evening together yesterday."

Adela drew a quick breath: she almost guessed what was coming.

"Now and then," Rolin went on with a slight smile, "the newspapers speculate as to who is the richer. Hale and I ourselves couldn't tell them within several hundred thousand dollars what we're worth."

"Yes, Father?" she said inquiringly.

"Penrhyn has been speaking to his father about you," Rolin said.

The Hales had the place next the Rolins. There had been much in common in the situation of the two families. Both men were widowers, with no intention of remarrying, each had an only child, and each had an inordinate passion for work. Adela and Penrhyn Hale had grown up together, with discreet absences when one or the other had been taken abroad or had been put into school. One of these absences had lasted three years, and when the two had met again, at seventeen and twenty, young Hale had fallen strongly in love with Adela. This devotion had lasted now, with brief periods of indignant withdrawal, for eight years. So far Adela's only recognition of it had been to permit it, and to miss it when it waxed sulky.

"Hale thinks," Rolin went on, "that you've not been quite—er—kind to Penrhyn. In short, I judge that Penrhyn is going to try his luck with you once more, and only once."

"I'm to have another chance?" murmured Adela, showing an alluring dimple. She had all the confidence of a beautiful girl, absolutely sure that life could not refuse her what she wanted, simply because she was herself.

"We conduct our business in our own way, you and I," said Rolin; "but you're twenty-five, and, so far as I can tell, there's been nobody—"

"Nobody since my French professor, when I was eight," she said lightly.

"I was reading a little character study of myself the